

Foreign Secretary statement on Iran

The United Kingdom has always been clear-sighted about our engagement with Iran.

We want to see Iran come in from the cold. But that can only happen if Iran shows the respect required for the basic principles of the rules-based international system.

Iran's violations are not mere technical breaches of international rules.

They are serious and systemic, destabilising actions, which undermine the international rule of law.

And those actions must have consequences.

Take, first, the recent attacks on the Aramco facilities in Saudi Arabia.

On 14 September, 18 drones and seven cruise missiles hit an oil field and a processing facility.

As the UK government, we took our time to assess the facts carefully and independently.

We are now confident that Iran was responsible. The evidence is clear, and there is no plausible alternative explanation.

This conduct amounts to an armed attack on Saudi Arabia, a violation of one of the basic principles of international law under the United Nations Charter.

The attacks caused serious damage in Saudi Arabia, and affected 5% of the world's oil supply.

In these circumstances, the UK has sought, and will continue to seek, to de-escalate tensions.

But our response is also an acid test of our resolve.

We have condemned the attacks in coordination not just with Saudi Arabia and the US but also with our European partners.

And I draw the attention of the House to the E3 statement released yesterday after meetings in New York.

We will now continue to work with the widest international support to determine the most effective response.

At the same time, Iran's attacks on the Aramco facilities are a reminder of the importance of ensuring that Iran never gains access to nuclear weapons.

That's why the UK remains committed to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of

Action, notwithstanding US withdrawal.

Equally, we have always recognised that it is not a perfect deal.

The JCPOA has its strengths – including its provisions granting the IAEA unfettered access to Iran’s nuclear facilities.

But it also has limitations – its provisions are time limited, with some expiring next year.

And it was never designed to address our long-standing concerns about Iran’s wider de-stabilising behaviour in the region.

Since May, Iran has gradually reduced its compliance with key aspects of the JCPOA putting the deal at risk.

So, before any wider progress is possible, Iran must reverse those steps and must come back into full compliance.

At the same time, as both President Trump and President Macron have said, we can improve upon the JCPOA. Ultimately, we need a longer-term framework that provides greater certainty over Iran’s nuclear programme.

And, as the attack on Aramco demonstrates, we must also bring into scope Iran’s wider destabilising activities.

That includes putting an end to Iran’s violations of the freedom of navigation, which are disrupting shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, and undermining the international law of the sea.

Alongside our partners, the US, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, we remain committed to the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), to ensure freedom of navigation in the region.

And we also welcome the European-led initiatives to achieve the same goals. We want the widest international support to uphold the international rules-based order.

We must also see an end to Iran’s interference in Yemen, which has stoked further conflict through support for the Houthi rebels and fuelled the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today.

A political solution is the only viable way to bring peace to that terrible conflict. Iran must start to play a constructive instead of a destructive role in that conflict.

And, finally, when it comes to respecting international law, Iran’s dire human rights record continues to be of serious concern to the UK, especially its practice of arbitrary detention of dual-nationals.

Today, there are a range of UK dual-nationals languishing in jail in Iran, typically arrested on spurious charges, denied due process and subject to mistreatment contrary to the basic tenets of international human rights law.

This practice causes great anguish and suffering not just to those detained, but also to their families.

Iran's behaviour is unlawful, cruel and it is totally unacceptable. I have raised all of these cases, along with Iran's wider conduct with Foreign Minister Zarif.

The Prime Minister raised the cases with President Rouhani yesterday in New York. And we will continue to press for their release.

So, Iran's record of respect for the basic rules of international law is woeful. And it is getting worse.

Let's be clear about this and the Iranian government's responsibility for the plight of its own people.

It is a matter of political choice. Their government's choice.

And yet even now, we retain the hope that we can work with Iran and our international partners to de-escalate tensions, to re-build confidence, and establish a clear path for Iran towards international respectability.

Iran is a proud nation. It has a rich history, and remarkable economic potential.

It is held back by a regime that fails to respect the fundamental tenets of the rules based international system.

So, Iran faces a choice.

It can double down on its approach, in which case international opposition to its behaviour will only intensify.

Or it can take immediate steps to de-escalate tensions and re-build international confidence, by respecting international law and reducing the range of threats it presents to its neighbours.

That is the only path to stability and prosperity – for Iran and the wider region.

And I commend this statement to the House.